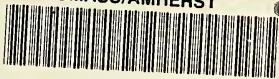


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The  
Problem of the Country Church

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**Synod Addresses**

Johnstown, N. Y.,

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CHARLES McKENZIE,  
Chairman Committee of Arrangements.

# The Country Community and the Country Church.

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By the REV. WARREN H. WILSON, Ph. D.

Department of Church and Labor,  
NEW YORK

The country church is married to the country community. She is sensitive to anything which has affected the country community. These two have not always maintained their ties and obligations. The community has sometimes sulked, and scarce spoken to the church for a period. The church has limited her services to a few and narrowed her love to a dry, formal duty. She has ministered sometimes to a calling list, not to the town, not to the whole population as she should. But it still remains that one call which can bring the country community upstanding, all together, is the call of religion.

The church is the sensitive register of the social life and the economic condition of the people. People talk about the church being narrow; if so, it is because that community is narrow. When the community is broad minded and large hearted the church is democratic and progressive. When the community is aristocratic, the church is proud. What more can you expect? Shall not two who are joined in vital bonds agree?

Three phases of community expanse in America have written themselves deeply into the church. They are the experience of the promoters, of the exploiters and of the cultivators of the soil. Each has had its church, in the above order, and the faithfulness of the church to the American community would require that in no other order should the country church develop. Her progress should be that of the population in which she serves.

The pioneer was a lone worker. In the woods his axe alone sounded. From his cabin no other was reached with the eye, or by even a far cry of the voice. He lived and thought and battled alone. His theology was therefore a doctrine of personal salvation which is a completed treasure of the church. It is the dogma of freedom and responsibility. He was a man of impulse and material for he practiced all the trades, from shoemaking to cutting hair and cutting grass. Adam Smith made clear the dependence of the worker at varied trades upon impulse. The pioneer used rum as a stimulus of his great feats. His religion was one of the emotions. Yearly or periodic revivals were his only or his primary method of church work. Finney and Nettleton made a fine art of the pioneer religion; but neither of these could revive rural New York today, because the pioneer is gone, and the scientific, systematic farmer has come.

The second stage of communal life was that of the exploiter. He was the man who saw the value of wealth for man's use. He went to California in 1849, not to settle, but to scoop up a fortune and come back. He in all the States turned from farming to mining and oil prospecting. Coal or iron, mica or even a clay bed gave him promises of a fortune. His church is the church whose chief doctrine is giving, building, endowing. It has been a great and valid stage of American church life. But we have come to the

outer edge of the value of money for spiritual things. In the past two years we have seen the limit beyond which wealth has no use for the gains of the soul or for the upbuilding of the community. Nevertheless the period of the exploiter has been a great one in the growth of the American community and church. Its doctrine of consecrated wealth and giving is a gain forever valuable.

The third period which is just now beginning is that of the cultivation of the soil. The exploiter has loved the land as a man may love a woman—greedily, selfishly. They have torn away the forests. They have violated the fair hillside with a mine. They have dishonored the country-side with the economic waste of black smoke.

But the Bible speaks of "managing the land." I never knew its meaning till I saw Tennessee and Illinois this year. There side by side is the outraged land and the lands cherished, cultivated, educated. The systematic farmer loves the land and studies it, trains it, fertilizes it, educates it. The soil of my first parish in New York, at Quaker Hill, is producing more at the close of two centuries of cultivation than at the beginning. Man by living on the land has learned how to give it more than he takes from it.

The church of the systematic farmer has come in some places. It is institutional, social, using qualities more than quantities; it guides every policy upon a comprehension of the entire problem. It serves the whole sight in a Christian civilization than several small struggling churches in population. It builds for the future, for the permanence of all values, as well as for immediate results. The same population who are scientific and systematic on the farm may be trained to be systematic and progressive in the church.

So the country church, married to the community, has shared the community's history. She has been poor and has toiled, she has slept and shall be awakened with the country community. She has not always been keenly in love with her mate, as married folks are wont to do. She is like the Scotchman who was sitting weeping on a stile by the roadside, and a passerby stopped to ask, "Why, Aleck, what makes you so sad?" "Oh, Donald McFadden's wife is dead!" "So, indeed, but I did not know you were related to her." "Oh, no, she was no kin o' mine—but Och, oh! everybody's gettin' a change but me!" The country minister and church are often forgetful of the charms and the value of the country community. They desire a change, but their life is bound up in the community's life.

The country church, married to the community, is poor, while the country community is fast becoming rich. The values of all farm products and of farm acres are swiftly rising. The farmers have lifted their mortgages, painted their barns and ordered automobiles. But the church is out of repair, the pastor's salary is in arrears, and the minister is a slave to humiliating poverty. The prospered farmer would not borrow on his once mortgaged lands; but he will borrow from his pastor each month a proportion of his salary, which he holds back. Why doesn't he go to the bank and get it at six per cent instead of taking a forced loan from God's servant without interest? In our Toledo "One Day Conference on the Country Church" last month the city pastors compared notes as to some men from country churches who did not attend. Dr. Shepherd told of one who after some hesitation finally, in response to his urging the invitation, pulled out his purse and showed its contents. "That's all the money I have—sixty cents!" he said, "and my church cannot send me. They are behind on my salary now!" Whereupon the pastor, Mr. Dugan, rose and said: "If you men will repeat this conference in the early future—so deeply do I appreciate its value—I have a member whom I have seen this afternoon, who will pay the expenses of all the ministers to the Presbytery, and an officer with each, in order that they may get the benefit." There is the contrast, father and brethren, between the poverty of the country church, starving and enslaving and degrading the minister, and the opulence of the city church, which has men of wealth ready at a word from the pastor to entertain a whole Presbytery, and pay the traveling expenses of his guests!

The Synod of Ohio has a plan for the evangelization of the pocketbooks



of the country churches. Evangelists are supplied to country churches, for a ten days' engagement. They are drilled in their work. Among their tasks is a meeting on Friday night of the church officers and leading men. A definite statement of the church's condition is made to them; and a financial proposal for the future. If they object, Synod's agent quietly says, "Gentlemen, I was sent here instructed to do this." They uniformly rise to their duty and the church is put on a financial basis adequate to the minister's duties and needs.

"The best thing that has come out of Synod," cried a layman of Bowling Green, when this story was told, "is your financial system." The human mind acts by waves of social opinion. The purse has to be evangelized just as every other organ has its commitments and its promises. I know no better agency for this service than the Synod. What has God given us our splendid denominational machinery for, Heresy-hunting? No, it is for deep plowing this worn out soil, harrowing, mellowing and seeding it, that the country community may, through the country church, bear increasing harvests in the coming seasons of God's providential husbandry.

"In the average church," declared a hard headed man, "nine-tenths of your difficulties will disappear when you straighten out your financial difficulties." The trouble is that the giving of the church is unconverted from pioneer standards. The country church member gives upon the impulse of a wood chopper, but he farms on the advice of Cornell professors. It is for the Synods to undertake deliberately, as Ohio has done, the specific conversion of the farmer's conscience and religious life to the systematic growing, without which no church can live in this day of systematic industry and organized social life.

But the country minister is mentally poor, as well as financially enslaved. Think of the mental resources of the young graduate of one our most noted seminaries who is still unplaced after six months, and is writing to Synodical superintendents asking for a charge, but insisting that he shall be assigned to no field or combination of fields where he shall have to keep a horse! Could such a man hold the respect of farmers? Could he who is collared and breeched and hitched up to such a condition win the respect of mechanics, or grocers or college students?

The country needs not the commonplace man, but the best man. Especially the best preachers. Nowhere are good sermons valued more than in farming communities. I heard of a theologian who had his first call to a country community, and he asked his professor, "What equipment shall I take. Doctor, to serve my people best?" And the Professor replied, "Take your best sermon!" Years afterward, having preached well, he was called to a city charge, and again he applied to the professor for advice as to his equipment, and this time the advice was "My boy, to the city charge take your best suit of clothes."

The country minister is depressed. He wants a change. He sees no charm in rural life. He has no purpose of lasting service. He needs a propaganda of rural life. He must be the prophet of the country, to clothe the fields with charm, and to grace the life of the farm home with culture and the enthusiasm of rural life. He must be the master of the rural conscience, and the apostle of rural leadership.

For this what preparation does he get in the seminaries? In our "One Day Conference on the Country Church," which the department of Church and Labor has been holding in six great agricultural States, the criticism of the seminaries has been unusual intense; and, most significant of all, it has been voiced by the devoted sons and diligent supporters of these institutions.

At Birmingham, Pa., the first man to leap to his feet—to his one foot—like a soldier as he is, was by Gen. James A. Brown, ex-Governor of the State. He declared that the theological student should be trained in the agricultural college, as a preparation for ministering to farmers. "He should know," he insisted, "how to bore a hole in the ground and tell a farmer whether that spot will be suitable for planting a Baldwin apple tree!"

This criticism again and again we heard. I understand that President Kenyon L. Butterfield, author of "Chapters in Rural Progress," urges the same remedy, the training of the minister in the agricultural college. But the ministers who are serving in the country feel the need of training in sociology. And why not? The knowledge of vegetable life might help them a little. But they are responsible for knowing human life, the subject of sociology!

When I, while a student in Seminary went to Columbia University to study geology, I was warned by friends, and I partly feared, that it "would take me out of the ministry." And when Professor Giddings assigned me to write a paper upon a country church and community, I objected, preferring some spread-eagle topic, now forgotten. But in the meantime the church I love to serve has created the department of Church and Labor, under the leadership of Mr. Stelzle who approaches the matter not from books, but from experience. And now the whole missionary problem has been transformed from a geographical to a sociological basis, and here I am speaking to you upon a sociological religious theme, "The Country Church."

The country church is suffering from profound and wide-spread depression. Agricultural districts are differentiated from other industries. They have their own capitals, their own leaders, and their own avenues of discussion and feeling. Within these fields the country church is separated off. The ministers feel themselves almost ostracized by their brethren in the same denomination. "What city minister offers to exchange with a country minister in these days," cried a synodical superintendent, in one of the Country Church Conferences. The country minister finds a meagre ideal of the country church imposed upon him. Nothing is expected of him, and as little as possible is given to him. This condition cannot be permanent, and does not express the real mind and feeling of the church. We are living in a state of temporary excitement over big business and the big city. But all the more on this account does the country minister feel the keen injustice of this neglect by the church as a whole. The effect upon him is to arouse an almost universal desire for a change. "All my ministers," said a Methodist Bishop, "desire to go to two places to live; New York City and heaven, and they want to go to New York City first." Our conferences have brought to light a significant number of contented and successful country ministers, who are perfectly at home in their work. One man has lived within sixty miles of New York for twenty years on \$300.00 a year and supported a wife. Another, in Pennsylvania, has brought up a family of sons who are to enter the Presbyterian ministry. These men are not impatient with the country; but their number is very small. Most country ministers are restless and discontented, and the state of feeling throughout their denominations raises in their mind the protest against rural conditions, and a distance for the limitations of rural life.

The country church in spite of her poverty, and in the face of the growing wealth of the community, has in her possession many of the resources which the country community needs. What are those resources?

First. The country church has a wealth for the community in the old members who have moved away. Its hold upon them is the most tenacious of any institution with which they have to do. Their success and their attainments always remain in sentiment and may be made in fact the possession of the community which sent them forth. The extent of this resource is scarcely appreciated. A reunion of the Plum Creek Church in Pennsylvania brought to light the fact that although this church was "running along with its tongue out" in raising a thousand dollars a year for its minister's salary, the former members of the church had come into possession of fifteen millions. The country church in those communities which have longest studied this problem is leading in the "Old Home Week movement"—an annual reunion, with the revision of the list of old members, with cultivation of interest in those members where they are, and sympathy with their attainments and experiences, with solicitation of gifts, and of endowment for

local institutions, with ample discussion of agriculture and other local industries and with the promoting of the literary interest in the taste of the "home town"—which has brought to the local community a wealth of human interest.

The second resource which belongs to the country community and the country church is given in the leaders who have arisen in the last decade. Very few, indeed, are the books on the country community and on rural life. Professor Bailey's "Cyclopedia of American Agriculture," Volume 4, and other writings of Professor Bailey of Cornell; Wilbur L. Anderson's "The Country Town," and Kenyon L. Butterfield's "Chapters in Rural Progress," belong on a shelf by themselves.

But the personal leadership, and the electric inspiration of Professor L. H. Bailey of Cornell, President Butterfield of Massachusetts Agricultural College at Amherst, Rev. Geo. Frederick Wells, the specialist in church federation in Burlington, Vermont, and the two splendid men whose service under the United States Government has been epoch making, Wilson and Pinchot, promise a propaganda of country life. These men are already enlisting volunteers great and small throughout the land. The next generation will see a wealth of literature of all sorts in exploiting and advocating and enjoying country life. There is promise that the church and the religious interest

The third resource of the country community and church is the reaction from the tide which has set toward the city. Now this drainage of the country communities into the city is not all bad. It has carried away many of the brilliant and ambitious. It has also drawn away the baser and worse elements from the country. The factory, the railroad, and the variety of city industries have attracted the bolder and more eccentric spirits out of the country community, both bad and good, and have sifted the population in a general way, leaving those who are best adapted to the industry in which the particular countryside can be most profitably worked. I know there are limitations in the process, but I believe the general effect of the sifting of population has been an improving and organizing of the country people. Now the tide has begun to set toward the country. In Altoona, the industrial capital of the Pennsylvania Railroad, 2,200 were discharged in 1907, because of the panic. Within a few weeks none of them were found in Altoona. They had gone to the farms where there is always a living. Two years later, when they were summoned back again by mail, they declined to come until better wages and more favorable hours and conditions should be promised. Ten years ago I went to the country to seek health in the summer for my household. This year, in the spot which I selected because I could afford to go there, there are twenty families who spend the summer together. They would have gone to the country somewhere, but became my rural neighbors simply because of personal acquaintance. All through the East the cities are contributing their children to the country communities, and this immigration into the country will remain. As a real estate man said, "People come from the city to the country once, and some of them are disappointed and come back. But they are never contented, and the country claims them again as residents, and from this second excursion to the open country they never return."

The fourth resource of the country community in this day which the church brings to her is the splendid democratic organization of Protestant denominations. Our own noble church with her organization seasoned by 400 years of self government comes to the country community with an endowment of priceless value. Is not the great need in the country, the need of co-operation and organization? Shall not the Presbyterian minister be the apostle of the spirit of his own church, teaching the farmer what it means to us to work together? Is our splendid organization to be used only for the petty purposes which express our differences of interpreting the Bible, or is it not to be used instead as it is used in Ohio Synod and the Presbytery of Huntingdon in Pennsylvania—to mention no other case—for the propaganda of country life, for the upbuilding of country communities through the Presbyterian church?

Let me be perfectly definite at this point. I believe that the synods in the Presbyterian church, which the city minister regards with languid interest, are the inheritance of power for the country church and the service of the country community. If the presbytery is often helpless to render aid to the country church in her great task—because the presbytery may be made up wholly of country churches, but the synod possesses the resources of a whole State—let the synods realize that this is their task. Let them adopt rural Evangelism, of which the General Assembly's Evangelistic Committee has become champion. Let them make that Evangelism systematic and constructive. Use it as a regimen of health for the country church. Put dynamite and jack screws, and new timber and plaster and shingles into it. Put an architect in charge, and let us hire contractors and demand results of them. And let us always remember that we have no selfish interest. Our creeds and standards require of us no denominational, narrow work, but the Presbyterian country church is to be an agency for the revival of the country community as well as thorough conversion of the country resident.

Fifth and greatest of all. The country church brings to the country community her inheritance of the gratitude of the churches, for out of her maternal bosom have gone forth four-fifths of the ministers who serve in cities, and of her are two-thirds of the leaders who are sustaining our great denomination. These men do not forget. They remember the shade of the trees in the village street, and the ball ground where they played as boys, and the swimming pool. They have not forgotten the red school house; its deficiencies as well as its abounding life and laughter; its substantial though irregular training. They need only to be told of their duty, and they will become members again of the community that sent them forth. All this wealth of sentiment and passion of remembrance is for the country church to transfer to the account of the country community and herself. Only the country church must believe in herself and in the community. She must renew her marriage bonds, and she must be loyal to the community whose life she shares.

My last general statement must be a brief review of the points which unite the country church and the country community. In our "One Day Conferences on the County Church," we are calling this statement "The Standard of Country Life." It is a sketch of the code of aspiration for the country church; the rule by which the country church shall reconstruct her life.

First. The country church has her doctrines of right and wrong for the community. You older men will remember when the temperance reform was a mere signing of pledges by individuals. Today the temperance reform is a propaganda as wide as the Nation, expressing itself through local option and law enforcement. It is a community doctrine, not a personal abstinence merely. The country church is speaking to the country community in the modern temperance movement; for mind you, modern temperance reform is the doctrine born of the country church. The whole agitation is manned and derived from the conditions of rural life awakened to the need of a community standard. In the modern temperance reform the city with its forces has been sterile. This agitation has used the cities as centers of transportation and occasional fields of financial harvesting, but the men and the resources and the opinion came from the country.

Second—in this communal code which the church is teaching the community—is Sabbath observance, on behalf of the workingman. The country church is realizing that the Sabbath day is being exploited by money-making. We are all alarmed at the fact recently disclosed that four million workingmen in America must labor on the day of rest. The church is not the owner of the Sabbath, but the trustee. She holds it for the men who toil. To them it was given in the Fourth Commandment and in the word of our Lord. The Sabbath has been a difficult burden for the church, and it has been of doubtful value to her, to use it as a sole day of worship. Today in the



interest of the great body of men who toil the Sabbath must be retaken, through the power of the State, and by the creation of public sentiment. It is the greatest effective shortening of the continuous strain of labor that the world has ever known. We may aspire to an eight-hour day, but we do well to set great value on the six-day week.

Men talk about "perishable goods," which must be moved on the day of rest. Nothing is more "perishable" than a shave or a hair-cut, but the barbers of New York State went to the Legislature, and demanded protection against the toil in their "perishable" industry on the Sabbath, and the Governor of New York has closed the barber shops on Sunday. Nothing is more perishable than meat, but the butchers' workers in New York went to the Legislature, and demanded that the butchershops be closed on the Sabbath, and they are closed. The workingmen of France and Italy are demanding the day of rest, and they are able, as the churches are not, to enforce this demand. In Rome a year ago some ladies of my acquaintance tried to buy the pretty Roman scarfs on their last day in the city, which was Sunday, but every shop in Rome, except a few where the Pope sells his relics, were closed. Did the Pope close them? Did the Protestant churches, or the tourists? Oh, no! They were closed by a law enforced by the Mayor of Rome, who is a Socialist by the name of Nathan, and a Jew.

The third feature in the communal good for country church and community is the promoting of recreation as a field of moral improvement. Our fathers in the great days of the Church's power were not afraid to speak of recreations and amusements and play. They were strong and masterful, it is true, but they were not without sympathy. The modern minister is afraid to deal with recreation; but the workingman is forced to seek organized public recreation, and he has discovered that its influence is good. The letters I receive from ministers throughout the country testify that public recreation in the towns is generally of an essential moral tone, though often the ministers inconsistently add that their attitude is one of opposition, or neutrality, toward all sports. But Dr. Luther Gulick, who was trained in our churches and colleges, a specialist in the Young Men's Christian Association, and employed for years by the New York public schools, says, "There is a higher moral training in the reactions of play than in the experiences of labor." It becomes the country community therefore to promote true recreation for its moral values. A doctrine of recreation and a standard for the spontaneous enjoyments of the young and of the working people in the community should be contributed by the country church to the population which it serves.

Fourth in the communal good is federation. I have spoken of the importance of the Presbyterian organization and organizing spirit. In the preaching of the ministers, shall the Presbyterian Church be afraid to make herself the center of a federation of the churches of the community, to contribute her broad, open spirit, with no prejudicial doctrine? Her inheritance is a leaven for the church life in the town. She has no reason to proselyte. She has no exclusively saving doctrine, or peculiar sacrament—no monopoly. Let her be as broad as her inheritance, and call the churches together into co-operative service to the whole population.

In communal doctrines the country church should contribute the reunion of old members to the country community. Every country church should be required by presbytery and synod to report as to her knowledge of her former members. Her hold upon them is the longest and most tenacious of all the institutions to which they join themselves. Let the synod make the country church responsible for these members on her own behalf and on their behalf. Their prosperity will enrich the country community, and her interest will govern their lives and sentiments as long as they live.

Third of the bonds which unite the country church and community is the missionary inheritance of the church. The country community is narrow and petty. Let the church inoculate the gossip of the town with missionary story, heroic biography, world-wide vision. The propaganda of foreign mis-

sions and city missions have peculiar fascination for country people. My own experience has been that rural congregations will give more willingly to home and foreign missions than to local church support. In my first parish the list of supporters of a missionary physician in China, whom the people had never seen, was the longest list in my church records; longer than the membership of church or Sunday school. It was the widest reach in which the church could include the residents in that countryside. The church should make everybody give something to missionary enterprises, and should put the printed matter of the great boards of the church in every farmer's and every tenant's house in the community. She should bring, moreover, the speaker and the exhibit from foreign lands to the platform of the country church, that people who have never seen any but one landscape may acknowledge the fascination of foreign harbors and distant continents, to which the Gospel is being sent by themselves.

Fourth of the bonds is that everybody should give to the support of the local church. I am not going to dwell on this. I have said enough about the Evangelism of the country church in the matter of giving. Convert the prosperous farmer into a benevolent man. No one will do it for him between birth and death but the country church. If he dies mean and narrow, it must be her fault as well as his own. She is nearest to him of all agencies. If he will not give to her support, his case is hopeless.

Last of all, even at the risk of repetition, let me say that the Presbyterian church in the country brings to the country community her great doctrine of organization and of co-operation. All through the land farm communities are seething with the agitation of farmers' unions, dairymen's leagues, fruit growers' associations. In this agitation let the church not be silent! She has a message mature, and a machinery well proven for the work, and her contribution to the working out of the problem of country life must, as the Country Life Commission showed, be the first factor in the revival of country life, which, than God! has begun.

I congratulate the Synod of New York and the Presbyterian church upon the progressive and scientific spirit in which she is leading ahead. And I challenge the theological seminaries to keep pace in the training of ministers with the spirit of the church, and the demands of the times.

## The Country Community and the Country Church.

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There are many persons who are scarcely aware that the rural church is now an insistent and perplexing problem, and some might even deny that this is so. It has been taught that the open country is a fertile soil for Christianity and we have been advised that the city with its haunts of crime is the point in the home field at which the church should make its most vigorous assaults. The deliberations of church bodies in the past have presented but little to disturb this point of view. In our representative gatherings, even in our home churches, the causes of home and foreign missions are urged with a system and efficiency that arouse our admiration and compel our support, but in these efforts the special interest of a field that lies at our very door, where we need not so much extension of effort as reconstruction of method has received comparatively little attention. The last General Assembly in its instructions to a committee appointed to consider social problems mentions the acquisition and use of wealth, the relations between employer and employee and between capital and labor, and the unnecessary existence of poverty, but it is silent as to the wide-spread rural needs. In view of this deliverance and other facts, it is not unfair to say that until quite recently, at least, the formulation and public discussion of this problem is mainly to be credited to a few students of rural sociology rather than to initiative or clearness of vision within the church itself. But notwithstanding the assertions that are being made, let us ask the question, "Is there a special country church problem, and if so what is it?"

In considering this question it has seemed to me that if there is any material change in the status of rural churches some numerical evidence of it should be obtainable. With this in mind I set myself at the somewhat laborious task of comparing conditions in 1880 and 1909 of all the Presbyterian churches in the State in places of less than 4,000 inhabitants excepting those that in 1880 were in the presbyteries of Long Island and New York. The number of churches so studied was 386, located in the territory now covered by eighteen presbyteries. I also made a similar study of 318 churches found outside of villages of 1,000 or more inhabitants, believing that by eliminating the larger places I could come nearer to discovering conditions as they exist in the remoter country districts. The data that I have elaborated relate mainly to membership and pastoral care.

The facts as to membership are as follows: In 1880, 386 village and township churches had a membership of 37,208, and in 1909, 38,224, a gain in 29 years of 1,016 members. The 318 township churches had in 1880 a membership of 25,310 and in 1909 it is 23,171 or a loss of 2,139 members. Of the village and township churches 181 increased in membership and 205 lost, while of the township churches 129 gained and 191 lost. In twelve of the eighteen presbyteries the strictly rural churches did not as a whole hold their own, some of the most prosperous agricultural sections of the State showing a loss.

Unless other denominations have been more successful than this one has, the strictly rural churches of New York are becoming numerically weakened.

The figures showing pastoral relations are even more significant. In 1880 somewhat more than one-third, or exactly 37 per cent of the village and township churches were supplied with pastors, while 189 or 49.5 per cent are marked as having stated supplies, and 51 or 13.5 per cent were vacant. The 318 township churches were in a worse plight, as only 101 or 31.8 per cent had pastors, 165 or 51.9 per cent were getting along with stated supplies and 52 or 16.3 per cent were shepherdless. The records for 1909 show that of the 318 township churches under consideration, 51 or about one-sixth had disappeared from the rolls and of the remaining 267, 52 were vacant, the vacant and extinct township churches together amounting to nearly one-third of those having an official existence in 1880. It is gratifying to note, however, that in 1909 the number of pastors in the churches in existence in 1880 had somewhat increased, there being nine more in the village churches and eleven more in churches outside of villages of not less than 1,000 inhabitants.

Unless my judgment is at fault these data should sharply arrest our attention. To be sure, it may be claimed with truth that the drop in membership of churches in the open country is not out of proportion to the decrease in rural population, and that decrease alone does not indicate a country church problem. Granting this, we may still point a solicitous finger to 51 dead churches and 52 with no recorded pastoral care of any kind.

Another fact of great import is that in 1880 more than one-half of the churches in places that in 1909 had not become villages of some size were without a settled pastor. It will be generally conceded. I am sure, that with stated supplies, especially where, as is often the case, the same minister preaches at two or more places, the most efficient leadership and pastoral care are generally not possible. Sermons alone are utterly insufficient to keep the church membership energized. Community leadership and an intimate contact with the people are now among the first essentials in the work of the Christian minister, conditions that, in a large number of cases are not met by the system of stated supplies.

But here, as in all discussions concerning the moral or religious status of a community, mere statistics do not adequately reveal the situation. The diminished influence of the country church is a much more serious matter than its diminished numbers. No one familiar with present rural life conditions can avoid the conclusion that for the men and women in the farm homes the church has to a serious extent ceased to be the center of social activity and the guide to determinative thinking. In many localities no religious organization of any kind holds a place of real influence in the life and thought of the people. One writer who has had unusual opportunity for a study of this problem, asserts that "concerned in too many cases with technical religion, formal piety and small empty social duties, the country church does not appeal strongly to men with rich red blood in their veins," a condition, as I shall try to show you that will not be remedied, however faithful and devoted is the service rendered by the country pastor until we have a somewhat radical redirection of rural church activities. When I view the situation as it has existed, indeed, as it still exists, I am not greatly surprised that we have a country church problem, and I am led to ask whether this denomination, or any other, has wisely distributed its energies. Has not the distant field, whether in the Far West or across the seas, been magnified out of proportion to its relative importance? Have you not to a greater degree applied the results of intelligent study and organization to other problems, especially to foreign mission work than to the saving of the religious life of the outlying districts of the State of New York? If the life blood of the churches in these older States is to flow into new regions and other climes, its current must be moved by an impulse from healthy and vigorous organisms. If we are to save the world we must first save ourselves.



As a rule it is much easier for a physician to declare that a man is sick than it is to cure him. So it is with the ills of the community or of any organization, the difficulty lies in finding remedies. This brings us to the question, what shall we do to strengthen the social and religious life of the open country? In order to answer this question intelligently, and with what definiteness we may, it is necessary to bring to mind some of the influences that have profoundly modified rural conditions during the past fifty years, as well as some of the modern factors that are designed to aid those whose feet are planted on the soil.

As late as the middle of the nineteenth century rural life conditions were greatly different from what they are now. No more than sixty years ago, the country home and the country village of the Eastern States included within themselves productive and manufacturing industries in such completeness as to nearly satisfy the necessities of the simpler life of that time. The farm home had its spinning wheel and loom, the farm produced practically all the family ate and to a great extent what it wore. In the village was found the cobbler, the blacksmith, the harness maker, the tin knocker and the grist mill. Outside of a limited number of commodities, barter was largely between neighbors and with the nearby general merchandise store. The isolation of these small but widely distributed centers of population was favorable to the maintenance of home enterprises and of such social activities as were adapted to country life, and the attention of the people was concentrated upon home institutions into which flowed the industrial and social energies of the surrounding community.

Two factors have wrought a great change. Just previous to the Civil War, and especially during several decades following the war, there occurred the most rapid and extensive opening up of new western lands for agricultural purposes that civilization has ever witnessed. Sixty years ago one-third of all our farms was in nine Eastern States and in a half century the center of our population and of our improved land moved from West Virginia to the Middle West. The building during that time of thousands of miles of railroad made possible this phenomenal occupancy of the fertile prairies both by carrying the settlers to new regions and by transporting their vast output of wheat, corn and cattle to eastern markets. Accompanying this transformation of our agriculture, and, indeed, as an essential part of it, came the development of labor saving machinery which either destroyed or greatly minimized the industrial activities of the farm home and small village, and centralized manufacturing in the large places. The combined influence of the large western output of staple agricultural products and of the rise of great manufacturing centers not only caused a severe depression in eastern agriculture but to an extent depopulated the open country. In 1909 the State of New York had 730,000 less people in places under 4,000 inhabitants than was the case in 1880. These changes reacted sharply upon the rural spirit and especially upon country institutions, including the school and the church. Rural life has become more or less drained of its social energy, in many places its characteristic recreations and social diversions have disappeared and the farm, both commercially and in matters of human interest has its attention fixed more largely out beyond its immediate environment. We have been brought face to face with the necessity of a readjustment of rural affairs, both economically and socially.

On the physical side of agriculture remedial agencies are at work and have been for some time. In 1862 the Congress of the United States initiated the agricultural colleges which, organized in every State and now attended by thousands of students, within the past two decades have come to exercise an important influence in agricultural affairs. In 1888 federal aid was granted to agricultural experiment stations which now fill a large place in the far-to agricultural experiment stations which now fill a large place in the farmers' thought and practice. Farmers' institutes and extension reading courses are subsidiary efforts maintained by these two classes of institutions, to which thousands of farmers and farmers' wives are giving attention. Through agencies of this kind there has been a marked advance in the knowledge and

art of agriculture. Besides, the economic situation as affecting the agriculture of the older States has greatly improved so that now the material interests of the eastern farmer are on the up grade. I am not certain that such is the case with his social and religious interests. While material prosperity is certainly favorable to the betterment of human conditions, the way in which added wealth is used depends upon the ideals of its possessor.

The Country Life Commission appointed by President Roosevelt found that in certain sections of a rich Middle-West State agricultural profits were being used to acquire more land or more cattle rather than to improve the quality of human living. Larger profits for the farmer are desirable, but they will not serve as an antidote to social and moral ills. The farmer's mind and heart must have better cultivation as well as his acres if we are to hold rural communities to high ideals of life. How shall the church aid in accomplishing this great end?

It seems to be generally agreed among those who direct the activities of the Presbyterian church, if we may judge by practice, that the old-time evangelistic efforts no longer appeal strongly to our long established country communities. We cannot hope, either, that the intermittent labors of missionaries will be especially effective in rejuvenating rural churches. I have already expressed the opinion that we need not so much extension of effort (although that is needed, as reconstruction of method and I will now amplify that statement by asserting that the work of organized Christianity among the rural people must be re-directed if it is to meet existing conditions. In the suggestion which I shall make in this connection I trust I may be pardoned if I seem presumptuous. The views I shall express are convictions that have come to me through a life-long experience in the service of the people on the land, and if I speak boldly, my interest in my constituency will be my excuse.

First of all, then, the country church should be a social service church, and institutional, so far as circumstances will permit. The greatest need of the open country today is a better organized and more attractive social life. I know from conversations with young men, that the lack of social advantages is their chief objection to agriculture as a vocation. The day of reasonable profits for the intelligent farmer is here, and for many the problem is not financial but social. A few years ago two high-type young men, graduates of a university, came to me for advice. One of them said this to me: "I can have a farm of several hundred acres of good land with good buildings. It is not closely adjacent to a city or large village. Can I settle there and live the life an educated man ought to live? Should I take a wife into such an environment?" These are the questions hundreds of young men are asking. If our best type of young men and women are to be held on the land as its owners and managers, we must develop high type country life institutions and attractive human relations, and if the rural church is to enter into its own, it must take a prominent part in accomplishing these results.

In order that the country church shall be the largest possible social factor, it must federate itself with all other agencies whose purpose is the betterment of rural life. The school, the grange, the farmers' institute and the community library should feel its influence. In these statements it is not held that the mission of the church is to institutions, either social or industrial. The message of the church is not to things but to human lives. So long as the pulpit is a power it will be because of its application of Bible truths to the individual life, but Christian organization can use many other agencies as avenues to the attention and sympathy and understanding of men. Should there not also be a federation of effort on the part of country churches of all denominations that are located within hailing distance? It is sometimes urged that denominational rivalry is a needed stimulus to religious activity but from my point of view there is no more pitiable the same neighborhood professing to serve the same Master and yet because

of denominational jealousies falling to unite in a common effort for the welfare of the community in which they are located. It is not asked that these churches merge their creeds or denominational polity, although barriers to such union are artificial and unnecessary, but they can at least merge their love to God and man in a united Christian service. There should be no smallness among the followers of the Great Servant of humanity.

Again the country pulpit, no less than the city pulpit, in its terminology and in its expression of religious truth should be adjusted to the spirit and conditions of modern thought. It is a mistake to suppose that the rural people are satisfied with a traditional faith. It is also a mistake to underrate the intellectual status of country life, thought and its appreciation of current issues and modern formulae. For fifty years their vocational thought has been directed toward scientific methods, the methods that we may call rational as distinguished from traditional. They are being taught that in material things uniform and fixed laws operate and that behind every effect lies a cause. During six days of the week in the pursuance of their calling, they expect authority to justify itself on a rational basis and when Sunday comes many of them are not inclined to forsake their every day habit of mind, and this should not be asked of them.

I wish to go farther and urge that the country pulpit should be readjusted to its environment, an environment whose thought and interests have a range and character of their own. Do you doubt the necessity of such readjustment? In the earlier days when the foundations of a new nation were being laid and questions of civil and religious liberty were at the front and when ecclesiastical authority occupied a larger place than it does now, the pulpit stood in an intimate relation to issues in which the people had a vital interest, and its utterances were regarded as ex-cathedral. The situation has changed with almost startling rapidity. Now new economic and social forces re-act upon religious work no less in the open country than anywhere else, and everywhere there is a changed attitude toward the pulpit. That in special instances the country pulpit has an adequate understanding of rural life needs, and is adapting itself to the community it serves, I do not doubt, but broadly speaking its efforts appear to need redirection. But the pulpit is the preacher, who out of the pulpit is the pastor, and so after all the central fact in this whole question of adjustment of country churches to their peculiar work is the preparation of the men who are to be religious teachers and leaders.

Sometime ago I remarked to the beloved President of the Seminary at Auburn that his students who are looking forward to country pastorates should start their preparation by a course in agriculture at the New York College of Agriculture. I meant by this that we have now reached a time when the future country pastor should be given a special training. Possibly it is not becoming in a layman to express such an opinion, but just as I hold that the public school is falling to do its share in equipping farmers' sons and daughters for active life, so I am convinced that the present curricula of theological seminaries inadequately train young men for leaders in the religious life of rural communities. What do these young men need to know? A great deal that cannot be acquired through a knowledge of Hebrew or Greek and which is decidedly foreign to the subject of church history, dogmatic theology, eschatology or church polity. These young men need to know something of the farmers' physical environment, of the lessons of the field and wood, of the economic and social forces that press in upon the farm home, of the educational agencies that are designed to aid agriculture and of the spirit and purpose of country institutions. These things should be understood, not that the progressive agriculture may be taught from the pulpit, but that the country pastor may become a leader among his people and may secure a sympathetic touch with their daily lives. The pastor who can teach a lesson from a growing plant and can speak to the farmer in the language of the field possesses

a vastly more efficient means of gaining the interest and confidence of his parishioners than comes from the ability to preach sermons freighted with academic lore. I have a dear friend, a notably successful pastor of a New England church, who in times past has found profit and pleasure in keeping a flock of hens. Some of his hens becoming ill he called in a Scotch neighbor for advice. The conference may not have cured the hens, but the next Sunday the Scotchman was for the first time an attendant on the services at my friend's church, a practice which he continued. A mutual appreciation of any subject serves as a bond of interest and sympathy between men. Some years ago the pastor of a church in a Maine village where I was spending my summer vacation said to me, "I wish there were more subjects about which I could converse with my people." This man was large hearted, able and scholarly, but he did not understand his environment, and he finally found his right place in an important city church. If now, there is any virtue in what has been said, if effective pastoral service in the open country demands special preparation, then the problem of the country church comes ultimately to the doors of the church seminaries. The time has come, if I may be so bold as to express the opinion, when our seminary teachers should seriously consider a radical reconstruction of their courses of study. It is fair to ask them whether some time could not be spared from the traditional subjects that for many years have held a place in the curriculum. In order that existing religious problems in their relations to social and economic conditions may be more fully considered, whether the student could not well be given less of the past and more of the present, whether the energy devoted to preparation for theological polemics could not with advantage be transferred in part to a consideration of social strategy, whether some of the philosophies should not be allowed to rest in peace and the activities be more fully given the field. No one should decry the value and utility of learning in any field of thought and activity, but it is a far cry from Greek exegesis and the ancient philosophies and religions to the issues that center around a country church in the twentieth century. We are told, to be sure, that the clergy should be equipped to defend the faith, but the most effective defense of the faith is not learned discussions to which this busy world pays little attention, but concrete examples of the moral upbuilding of individual and community life. During the past twenty-five years the American colleges and universities have been obliged to radically reconstruct their courses of study in order to offer the educational facilities that meet present day demands. Have the theological seminaries been equally responsive to new conditions? These queries are not intended as reflections on the scholarship and exalted service with which our teachers are honoring the church, but could not the academic side of theological training wisely be supplemented by non-resident lecturers, who, fresh from industrial and social warfare could develop in the minds of the young men a practical conception of the conditions they must meet in the work before them? I leave these questions with you. Let us hope that they will be wisely answered. Now is an opportune time in which to consider them. A new phase of development appears to be just ahead of the agriculture of the East. The free homestead lands of the West are all occupied, and "an undertow seems to be setting back" upon the older States. This means a more intensive occupancy of the tillable acres of New York and larger possibilities for rural life both industrially and socially. Organized Christianity should recognize the opportunity and prepare to meet it. Is it not possible to fire the imagination of young men with a vision of what may be accomplished not alone at distant points, but within our own borders? Nothing is more important to our national welfare than that the agricultural people shall for all time remain intelligent, self-directive and capable of contributing to our moral and religious progress. To this end the church should spare no pains to nourish in the farm homes an abiding loyalty to the highest Christian ideals of life and service.



## Shall We Have a New Catechism?

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I undertake the discussion of this question only with the clear understanding that it is but a part of the broader question, "Shall We Revise Our System of Religious Education?" If the larger enterprise is to be left in its present amorphous condition I suppose that it does not matter greatly what we do about the Catechism—or whether we do anything.

Last spring it was the duty of the writer of this paper to prepare for Albany Presbytery the Annual Narrative of Christian Life and Work. Among other matters of various degrees of interest, one item seemed to be especially significant. In answer to the question, "Is the Shorter Catechism taught in your Sunday-school?" a large majority of the churches replied in the negative. After the replies had been analyzed on the basis of the numerical strength of the schools concerned it appeared that approximately three-fourths of the scholars of the presbytery were going without catechetical instruction. Inasmuch as we hear from Siam that "there is little teaching of the Catechism," and from Tennessee that "there is lack of catechetical instruction," we may not unreasonably suppose that the use of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is declining throughout the Church. Before seeking an answer to the specific question whether we care for any catechism nowadays, it will be worth while to inquire into the causes that underlie the present evident neglect.

It will probably be generally admitted that the Church of today is experiencing the discomforts attending the passing away of authority. The principle of personal liberty has been carried to great lengths in our secular life; the signs are that the modern man, at least in America, is disposed to go quite as far in matters of religion. In fact, the ultra-democratic point of view already characterizes the attitude of many church members. They believe what they please and pass what they do not like; they go to church or not as suits their whim. Whatever variation of opinion there may be as to proper remedies, most of us will accept this diagnosis. Are we not right in going further and saying that this is our problem par excellence—the restoration of authority to the Church? Not external authority—she cares not nor has cared for that since the day she demitted her right to call upon the secular arm to enforce her decrees. But a somewhat by virtue of which she will more tenaciously hold her own people and so impress the world with her power to control men's lives, this the church must have or perish. The church that does not exercise mastery is a dead institution.

We are at this point face to face with the problem of method. How are we to go about the re-establishment of churchly authority? There are two methods, widely different from each other. The characteristic of the one is its insistence upon immediate results; its object is to compass the conversion of grown men and women to the service of Christ in the Church; its outstanding phenomenon is the widespread evangelistic movement of today. The other method is bound, perforce, to wait longer for the fruits of its toil; its object is the proper Christian training of children, to the end that they may grow up to be loyal followers of the Lord Jesus. There will probably always be occasion for the employment of both methods of work. But

It is my profound conviction that it is a mistake of tragic proportions to suppose that the enlarged scope, the ingenuity and the resourcefulness of evangelistic campaigns are capable of meeting the present need. We have grossly failed to adapt our systems of religious education to the needs of the changing times, and we are paying our proper and disgraceful penalty in the apparent futility of much of our present Sunday-school work. Here is the seat of the disease and here the cure must begin.

Now emerges the question, "Of what use, if any, is a catechism in the religious instruction of children?" The obvious answer historically is, that a catechism is to be used in the training of catechumens. And this obvious answer I believe to be precisely the correct answer. One may doubt whether the most excellent catechism imaginable could survive the haphazard mode of use to which the Westminster Catechism has, in some quarters, long been subjected. There comes vividly to my mind the effort of sheer memory by which we youngsters in Southern Sunday Schools seized the big phrases of those amazing answers, at the rate of one question for each Sunday. So much memorizing to be done each week, that was all it meant. There stood those imposing words, massive to the vision, unexplained if not inexplicable, and leading no-whither. Now I conceive a catechism to be made for other service than that.

The principal if not the only proper use for a catechism is as a basis for teaching the fundamentals of the Christian Religion to groups of children old enough to be looking forward seriously to uniting with the Church. A good catechism intelligently used ought to be of great service in these circumstances—preparatory to confirmation, to borrow a phrase from the older churches. The function of a catechism is to set the mind in favor of certain modes of thinking and doing. Now both in point of fairness to the child, and for real efficacy, it is necessary that such a catechism concern itself with the most essential and practical matters with which the Christian Religion has to do. When we undertake to nourish a bias it is well that we regard closely what we are about. We must see to it that it is a proper bias, as proper as the bias in favor of truth against lies, toward courage against cowardice, toward purity against all uncleanness. With just this sort of service in view, however, I believe the present neglect of the Shorter Catechism to be justified by the obvious shortcomings of the document itself.

When I say "shortcomings," I use the word with discretion, because it is just the inadequacy of the catechism with which we are so generally finding fault.

Let me preface what I am about to say in reference to our catechism with a few earnest words as to my own state of mind. I am not in a controversial mood; I have no controversy with my brethren in Christ that is important enough to make me forget my serious quarrel with all paganism. This occasion is not for me a mere theological field-day. What I shall say, whether valuable or otherwise, is intended as a serious contribution to the discussion of an important practical question, namely, the fitness, in content and form, of the Shorter Catechism for our present purposes of Christian instruction.

Let us consider the matter first, and afterward the manner of its presentation. We are restricted by time to the consideration of a few important questions which will, I believe, be admitted by you all to be characteristic and fundamental. The answer to Question 7 (What are the decrees of God?) is a strong statement of the doctrine of Predestination. It is Calvinism of the supralapsarian type. The fact stares us in the face that at least ninety per cent of the preachers and teachers in our church mingle with their Calvinistic determinism a strong dash of Arminian conditionalism. What decent excuse can we give for offering as milk for babes that which is a very hard saying even for theological athletes? There is no reason to believe that their understanding of the character of God will be one whit the better by the process. The answer to Question 9

gives six days as the length of time occupied in the work of Creation. Apart from the fact that no one believes that statement to be accurate, the question very properly arises as to what possible religious use it could have even if it were true. In what way can it help children understand the nature of the Christian Religion, to set any definite term to the duration of God's creative activity? Questions 10 to 19 are concerned with the doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin, both of which doctrines have fallen into almost universal desuetude. The belief in the evolutionary process as God's method of dealing with the world has taken such a firm hold on men's minds that the older conception has almost disappeared from view. It is also evident by this time that the change has not damaged in the slightest the Christian conception of the character of God. Is it well to give the space of ten questions and answers to that which is but a record of what all men once thought, but which very few men think now?

Question 20 draws out a singularly unfortunate statement of God's purpose of Salvation in terms of the doctrine of Election. The objection stated in the case of Question 7 obtains even more decidedly here. Concerning the form of the answer more will be said later. Questions 21 to 23 describe the redemptive work of Christ according to the Anselmic form of the doctrine of Atonement, with its characteristic over-emphasis upon the justice and the wrath of God, and upon the substitutionary rather than the associative character of Reconciliation. The tripartite setting forth of the work of Christ as prophet, priest and king falls entirely to give proper weight to the significance of the earthly life and personality of the Lord Jesus. Questions 40 to 80 are wholly taken up with the repetition and explanation of the Ten Commandments. Here we might profitably take a leaf out of the Book of Common Prayer, which gives the contents of the two tables in one answer. The exposition is given in two answers, summarizing our duty to God and to our fellow men. Both catechisms, however, failed to adopt the simple expedient, so close at hand, of adding as expository material Jesus' own summary of the law and the fine words of the Golden Rule. Our catechism, it is true, incorporates the summary of Jesus, but fails to get the benefit of its expository value, by inserting it at Question 41, before, instead of after, the text of the Decalogue. As against such a simple scheme (elaborated, of course, with oral explanation), the use of forty questions and answers is cumbersome and ineffective. In questions 84 and 85 the fathers fall again to their inevitable task of expounding the plan of Salvation as a means of escape from God's wrath and curse. To give this view of Redemption an important place in an instrument to be used in the Christian nurture of children is surely a sad case of misdirected energy. I venture the assertion that there are very few of us who wish our children to begin the Christian life after the manner of a flight from Bunyan's City of Destruction.

You will observe that in the foregoing certain omissions in the catechism have been noted, usually by implication. Let me state them here explicitly.

(1) Nowhere in the whole catechism is the love of God for all men stated as the ultimate ground of Redemption.

(2) The value of the Incarnation as God's mode of effecting the supreme revelation of himself in human life is only vaguely and imperfectly suggested (Question 21).

(3) The winning personality of the Master is almost lost sight of in the wilderness of words defining the place of Christ in the system of doctrine.

(4) There is a woeful lack of any clear and inspiring expression of the distinctive Christian ideals of conduct, self-sacrifice and service.

We come now to the consideration of the form of the catechism. Our criticism here concerns two points: (1) The phraseology, because of the effort to attain theological precision of statement, is often very difficult, while it ought to be simple and easily understood; (2) It is dry, hard and unemotional, rather shunning than seeking modes of expression which touch the heart. The model for such sentences should be found in the simplicity and beauty of the

great passages of Scripture. It is safe to say that the Shorter Catechism is only occasionally simple and almost never beautiful. Dignity it has, beyond doubt, but it is the dignity of a carefully written official document, not the dignity—closely akin to beauty—of a soul-compelling religious utterance. These are not the phrases that leap from the heart to the lips when the life is beset with danger.

To put the matter in a sentence, the attempt to compass theological exactness has been highly detrimental to the form of the catechism. In many instances the consequence has been to treat as negligible fine Scriptural material setting forth in the most admirable words the very truth under consideration. Even the magnificent and awful words describing the nature of God are not comparable, for catechetical use, with the opening clause of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father who art in Heaven." If we are to speak of that which is termed theologically the "humiliation of Christ," the catechism tells of "his being born and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time." How much better to say, quoting Heb. 2:10, 11, that "It became God, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Author of our salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." The religious value of the doctrine is suggested here with superlative beauty. Let the pastor with his class before him use that for his text, and he has something worth expounding.

Even where the matter involved is in the very essence of it a thing of fervid emotion, the statement is cold to the point of frigidity. Witness the declaration of God's provision for man's salvation (Question 20): "God, having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of his misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer." What sinister transformation has been wrought, to turn into such forbidding guise the glorious words of John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."

It all comes back to this: The nature of religious truth is such that it cannot be expressed with exactitude. The memorable passages of Scripture aim at something very different. They are soaring expressions of the soul's experience; they record, not what the ratiocinative faculty has wrought out, but what the life of the man feels when touched to humble yet joyful devotion by contact with the Spirit of God.

I beg to remind you that the foregoing criticism is merely a brief review of the reasons why, in the opinion of the writer, our church is ceasing to use the Shorter Catechism. And, on the whole, they seem to be good reasons. Whether we are fully conscious of it or not, we want the contents of the catechism to be concerned with the great things of Christian faith and life, and not with the things of essentially scholastic interest. We want phrases which shall exercise power over the mind, not by the compulsion of imperfect logic but by virtue of fine spiritual fervor. Our tacit ignoring of the old catechism amounts, I think, to an indictment of it on both counts. Some things fundamentally important are not to be found there; much that is there is not of fundamental importance. Even when its statements are true they are not interesting; they may be important but they are not spiritually impressive. The divine fire is as essential to the life of religion as to the life of poetry. Where the reading leaves us stone cold, how can we hope for great results by putting these hard and discouraging formulas into the eager minds of the young people in our charge? For my part, I would rather have my children memorize half a dozen hymns such as "Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me," "The Son of God Goes Forth to War," and "Christ for the World We Sing," than to be letter-perfect in all the official catechisms of English-speaking Christendom.



Yet creeds and catechisms do but follow necessity in sounding the note of controversy. All these symbols have as it were the smell of fire on their garments. They are noteworthy documents in the history of theological polemics. Again and again, in face of the great questions of the age, earnest Christian men have set themselves to the task of making plain, in hard philosophical phrases, just what seemed most necessary to remember and to live by, and what most needful to be combated and put to rout. But the years go by, and with their passing the inevitable changes come over the face of things and ideas. Even the most conservative of us, if we be not stocks and stones but men, modify our views until our theological forefathers would hardly know us for their own. And thus it comes to pass that we of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America are leaving the Shorter Catechism out of our Sunday-school curriculum. We feel that it represents a struggle, but not our struggle; we know that there are no words so dead as those which make the phrases of a dead controversy. When we view, now and then, a belated quarrel over one of these issues, it is as though we were looking on at the mimic warfare of children on some old battlefield.<sup>6</sup> To those who are taking part in the engagement it may all, for the time, seem real enough; to the onlooker it is quite certainly child's play.

"A struggle, but not our struggle"; which, being interpreted, signifies that the new catechism, if there is to be one, will also be the proclamation of a strife. Here is the crucial question: What is the present struggle of the Church? The only answer that is large enough to meet the situation is this: The present conflict is that of Christianity as the ultimate religion with all irreligion; it is the fight of the spiritual against all materialism; it is the struggle of those beliefs that spring out of faith in Man as the child of God against that array of denials whose sire is the hard creed that men are only insignificant pieces of a soulless Universe. The old catechisms came out of struggles between sects; the New Catechism must come out of the struggle of Christianity against Paganism.

A catechism whose motto is "Christus contra Mundum" will necessarily be in many ways a new thing under the sun. Its emphases will render it remarkable; its omissions as well as its assertions will be noteworthy. When once we set to work to build such a document, we shall probably not care a fig whether its teachings smack of Augustine and John Calvin or not, so long as they show forth worthily the spirit of the Lord Jesus. Sectarians we may have to remain for a while, on purely practical grounds, but aggressive sectarianism can no longer pose as militant Christianity. We may safely make the following suggestions as to the form and content of the New Catechism.

(1) Its phraseology must be simple and ought to be beautiful. There will be but slight attempt to satisfy the taste of scholastics who have only an academic interest in it, but very earnest effort to adapt it to the hearts and minds of children who have practical need of it. We shall not be ashamed to state religious truth in emotional terminology. The thing we are after is to express what we feel about human life and its meaning from the Christian point of view. We would state our faith rationally of course, but we dare not lose sight of the fact that it is faith, not mathematics, with which we are dealing; that the words we use must be of the sort that carry spiritual conviction rather than mere logical force. No statement will be put in more difficult terms than appear in its best Scriptural form. We have to do, not with syllogisms, but with pictures; we are estimating not quantities but values.

(2) As to content, we shall restrict our material to the consideration of the central doctrines, those of obviously deep religious significance. This will result in decided abbreviation in the length of the catechism, a matter of some advantage. I am disposed to believe that a much greater emphasis than heretofore will be placed upon the practical significance of the distinctively Christian mode of thinking. We shall try to tell what is the



characteristic conduct of Christians. We have, as churchmen, been accused of handling with gloves the serious moral issues of our time. The New Catechism will in all likelihood have something plain to say about the necessary consequences of believing in the Brotherhood of Man and the Kingdom of God.

So long as we are working under the denominational form, it may be worth while to give, as supplementary material, some instruction as to the peculiar methods of Presbyterianism. But these matters will be stated not as the phenomena of a sacrosanct institution but as the modes of working which we have found most useful in getting our part of the work of the Church accomplished. In using the catechism we are to remember that it is mere superstition to suppose that a catechism must be memorized in toto. A catechetical answer may best be regarded, not as a final statement of the truth involved, but as a basis for conscientious and careful exposition.

And now, who is ready for the work? Who will make us this catechism? A difficult question, no doubt, answerable for the present only in the following terms: If pastors, individually or in groups, will make the effort to evolve some scheme of catechetical instruction for the children in their own charge, we shall have taken the first step in the right direction.

I am not at all sure but that some such catechism has already been written. I am confident that scores of them might be written, any one of which would be more useful than the one which we are so unanimous in venerating and neglecting. All that we need for the accomplishment of the task is a faith in the validity of our religious experience worthy to be placed beside our faith in the validity of Scripture. It is surely just as sound orthodoxy to hold that the Spirit of God is a guide for us, as it is to hold that he guided Augustine and Calvin, and—may we not add?—Arminius. It is not a question of ability; we are just as competent to meet this serious problem of our time as the Presbyterians of two or three centuries ago were to meet theirs. It is not faith but skepticism that makes us withhold our hands from doing what God has set as our task for today.

We are to conclude then that it is a question of courage, the product of a living faith. There is no room in the present for institutions whose respect for the past is so great that it stands in the light of living needs. Jesus rebuked the men of his day because they could not read the signs of the times. His thrilling words, "It was said by them of old . . . but I say unto you", carries to the hearts of his disciples in every age a burning contagion of the spirit they must who would follow Him. The world, both religious and pagan, is giving its millions to the great cause of secular education. Ferrer in Spain only the other day gave his life for what was to him the cause of education. Yet Ferrer was an anarchist—and an atheist. If sheer humanitarianism can carry a man so far; if the enthusiasm for Liberty is of such power as this, what marvellous accomplishment should be ours under the impelling force of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ! How much time, how much careful and loving labor ought not we, the appointed leaders of the Church, to give, that the boys and girls in our charge may become well-instructed, fearless and consecrated Christians!

It is the gift of God that we are heirs of a glorious past. It is no less his decree that makes us bondmen to ideals which have not yet had their perfect realization, and will not have it until the souls of men are fast tied together in the love of Christ Jesus our Lord. It is to the bringing in of the Kingdom that we are called. The City of God is still building. Christ is with us—if we build. It is his voice we hear: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."



